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Understanding the behaviour of cultural tourists

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Summary

There is an increasing recognition of the importance of culture and heritage for tourist motivation, behaviour and experiences. Estimates vary according to definitions, but statistics indicate the potential significance of cultural tourism in the global market. For instance, the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) estimates that cultural tourism accounts for 37% of all tourist trips (McKercher, 2002a). Many studies of cultural tourism focus on documenting the size of the market, rather than examining the nuances that exist (McKercher, 2002), which may limit understanding of important niches (Hughes & Allen, 2005). One reason why cultural tourism remains poorly understood is that the early stage of research focused explicitly on the motives of tourists who visit cultural heritage destinations. The overall aim of this study is to understand the behaviour and the experience of tourists visiting cultural sites and attractions during holidays. The research questions of this study were as follows: First, how can cultural tourism be defined in terms of the experience of the tourist? Second, how can the terms cultural tourism be operationalised in relation to time spent and importance of culture in the vacation? Third, what determines the nature of experience? Fourth, which components of experience play a role in the experience of culture while on holiday? And fifth, what is the difference/relationship between expectation and experience in this respect? The operationalisation of this PhD research study consisted of one pilot project, an explorative case study and a final empirical study - tele-survey. Chapter two explores and provides an overview of the literature on the importance of time-space behaviour in relation to cultural tourism, identification of the tourist recreation complexes, the time-space analysis, tourist recreation complexes as a network, activity-based approaches and models and approaches for analysing time-space and its contribution to tourism. In chapter three, the theoretical perspective concerning the several features has been developed, which include: the consumption of tourism, consumption and cultural change, tourism and consumption culture, the mistake of homogenisation, postmodernism, tourism and post-tourist's features, tourist behaviour, tourist typologies and the significance and the need of tourism typologies, motivation, experience of tourist and finally the components of experience. A final questionnaire was constituted from all these features that were discussed in this chapter (see chapter 6). Chapter four is the participation with the ATLAS Cultural Tourism Project (Association for Tourism and Leisure Education). The "NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences" is one of the collaborators of this research project, and students labour has been used from the NHTV in conducting this survey. The main aim of this input was to test the questions on expectations, experience, time spent and the importance of culture during a holiday and perhaps get insight into the whole issue of time spent. Based on the previous chapters and the find-

ings of ATLAS pilot project, basic assumptions and detailed research questions were formulated. Chapter five was the application of theory (chapter two) to the practice, which presents the outcomes of the exploratory case study of time-space behaviour of visitors in Breda, The Netherlands. This study reveals how tourists assemble the essential elements of a day trip in quite different ways. Tourists combine various activities to do and to see in Breda. Two models were shown in terms of their activities, and how these tourists behave in terms of time and space. Demonstrations of how different the time-space paths of individual tourists to Breda were revealed. Knowledge about the behaviour of tourists in terms of time and space strongly contributes to the awareness of mutual connections between different tourist sites and locations. In this way, studies on the behaviour of tourists in time and space can also improve the awareness of the strengths and limitations of a destination. Cultural and heritage sites consumed differently by different visitors and the management of these sites depend on understanding the way tourists consume these attractions. The literature on the cultural tourism market is still largely in its infancy, with the majority of studies still interested in documenting the size of the assumed cultural market, rather than examining the differences that exist within this market. What is less well understood is that the different segments have different interests in and abilities to consume cultural and heritage tourism products, which translates into quite different behaviour. Chapter six is the final empirical study. It consists of two parts. The first part explains the methodology, the telephone-survey, and the operationalisation. The second part introduced the findings and the analyses of the tele-survey. These findings made an attempt to answer the objectives of this study, which are outlined in chapter four. The final chapter (chapter seven) contains the conclusions, implications and future research. This study identified heterogeneity among tourists visiting cultural and heritage sites in The Netherlands, and found significant differences between groups in terms of time spent and the importance of culture during holidays.. This finding contradicts the contention that most tourists to cultural and heritage sites are generalist recreation visitors and these sites are visited because of the convenient locations (Balcar and Pearce, 1996; Prentice, 1993b). Although the number of segments or clusters varies from one study to another, cohesion between these findings and previous research is that a continuum of the cultural tourist segment seems to exist. Typology of cultural tourists was proposed based on the time spent at cultural sites and attractions and the importance of cultural element during a holiday. Five types of cultural tourists were identified, ranging from those for whom culture play no role and spent various hours at cultural sites, to those who were highly motivated to travel for cultural reasons (or the cultural elements are very important during a holiday), and spent also various hours at cultural sites and attractions. This study reveals that the main key and primary element is families and friends as the basis for

the experience and subsequently comes cultural tourism as an element in the vacation experience. In reality, it makes no difference what tourists visit in terms of culture but it makes a difference if they visit a cultural site together with families and friends that may make the quality of experience deeper and more interesting. This finding corresponds with the 'culture-peripheral' of Hughes (2002). Hughes argues that tourists at museums, historic buildings, art gallery or theatre can be classified as 'culture-core' or 'culture-peripheral'. In terms of 'culture-peripheral' these tourists will be away from home primarily for other reasons than culture, such as wanting to enjoy scenery or visiting friends and relatives (VFR). They are at a museum or a theatre only as part of a stay away from home, which is for another reason. Culture is not the core of the visit but is outside that, at the periphery. It was identified in this study that tourists visit cultural heritage for different reasons and indicated that tourists are interested in different experiences; some want to learn about Dutch culture while others want to spend more time with families and friends while consuming culture. This should influence the marketing of such places. For example, it may be more appropriate to target the market in different ways, rather than provide just 'straight away/direct translation of a marketing promotion when different target markets exist (as common for cultural and heritage sites nowadays) (Poria, Butler and Airey, 2006). This of course is called segmentation, separation and targeting. Once tourists are at the site, they can be provided with different interpretations. Cultural and heritage managers should plan their interpretation in line with these findings. One form of interpretation should be provided for those who want to learn and another for those who 'seek to go beyond knowledge- to engage the senses and emotions of the visitor' (Black, 2001:128). Findings of this study are central to the debate about a cultural tourism definition. Is it possible to determine if a tourist trip is cultural by the activity itself or by the 'cultural intent', 'time spent' or 'the importance of culture' pursued by the tourist? Answering this question, indeed, requires additional thoughts and research.